

SERMON NOTES

By Pastor John Paul Miller

In The Grip of God's Grace

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans

Romans 16:17-20 - "Paul's Protective Heart"

Romans 16:17-20, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."*

Paul in his closing chapter of Romans has commended unto them – Phebe (vs. 1-2).

- He extended his personal greetings (vs. 3-16)
- Now he issues a stern warning (vs. 17-20)

In verse 16 Paul instructed us to greet one another with a holy kiss. But not all who come into the church should be welcomed with a kiss. Not everyone was working with Paul to spread the truth of the gospel; some for selfish reasons were dividing the church by teaching false doctrine (vs. 17-18).

Who were these false teachers?

Paul doesn't say, but a good guess would be the Antinomians (***Antinomianism*** - ***Greek anti,"against"; nomos,"law"***) is the doctrine that faith in Christ frees the Christian from obligation to observe the moral law as set forth in the Old Testament.) or, Jewish legalists – the Judaizers (***the Judaizers - a Christian sect still adhering to the Jewish Law, they came from converted Pharisees. Unwilling to see Judaism die out the Judaizers adopted a legalistic idea of salvation. They insisted that no non-Jews could be saved without submitting to circumcision and observing the Law of Moses.***)

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse - The situation against which Paul is warning these believers is not so much the introduction of doctrines that would deny the essentials of Christian truth as practices which would result in true believers being split into various factions.

Let's not forget Jude 3, 4:

Jude 3,4, *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Before we look at the text there are a few things to make note of:

1. I want you to note that there is such a thing as false teaching and false teachers.

Why do I point this out?

Because of today's dominant worldview known as *Postmodernism*.

Fritz Ridenour, in his book, "So What's the Difference?" ,

Basic principles of postmodernism include

1. None of us thinks independently, without bias; we have all been molded by our culture to think in certain ways.
2. You cannot judge (pronounced wrong) the thoughts, ideas or actions of another culture or another person because his or her idea of reality is different from yours.
3. Each person's reality is in his or her own mind. You construct your own reality. Whatever is real to you is your reality.
4. None of us can "prove" anything, whether we use science, history or any other set of facts.

In essence, postmodernism goes beyond modernism, which claims that all moral and ethical truth are relative. Postmodernism says *there is no absolute truth anywhere*. Postmodernists believe that all truth is always changing, whether it is spiritual, moral, political – even scientific truth is suspect. Postmodernists believe all truth is "manufactured," a product of the culture in which we live and the language we use. We are all just "products of our culture, cogs in a social machine."

The postmodern worldview is everywhere today – in the universities, the media, films, TV, even the local PTA. It affects you and your family in a thousand different ways and will increasingly do so in the future. Postmodernism is not easy to understand, but Christians living in the third millennium must learn how to deal with it by recognizing its basic premises and assumptions.

One of the most powerful and dangerous characteristics of the postmodern mind is an absolute dedication to its concept of tolerance. To be tolerant in the traditional sense is to see a difference between what a person thinks or does (which you may not necessarily think is right) and the person himself. While you treat that person with respect, you are also free to say how he thinks, talks or acts is wrong and, in your opinion, should be changed.

Today the new definition of tolerance is spread and promoted by philosophers, educators and other leaders, who give all values and beliefs equal respect and deny categorically there is any such thing as a “hierarchy of truth.”

In today’s public schools, children and youth are being taught that “what every individual believes or says is equally right, equally valid. So not only does everyone have an equal right to his beliefs, but all beliefs are equal. All values are equal. All lifestyles are equal. All truth claims are equal.”

As Christians we must maintain a Christian worldview, or Biblical worldview.

That absolute truth does exist and is found in the Bible, God’s revealed truth, and Jesus Christ who said, *“I am the way, the truth and the life... (John 14:6)”*

2. The second thing I want to point out is that it’s the pastors, or shepherds who are responsible to watch for and warn the flock of false teachers.

It’s not popular today

It’s the most loving thing a true pastor can do!

Paul did it

Jesus did it – Matthew 7:15, *“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”*

A pastor who doesn’t do this is a “hireling”.

Pastors are to protect God’s flock from error and seek to establish them in the truth.

In our text today, we find Paul making a threefold plea:

I. A Plea for Vigilance (vs. 17a)

Romans 16:17a, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned;”*

A. The first thing we are to do is “mark them”

Notice what it doesn’t say

Illustration – Kill them, as in the Middle Ages.

- B. It says “mark them”, or literally, “keep your eye’s on them”; we get our word “scope”, as in telescope, and microscope. We also get our word “Bishop” from it, which means an overseer.

Illustrations:

New Testament:

Acts 20:28-32, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

Old Testament:

Ezekiel 3:17, “... I have made thee a watchman...”

Acts 20:28, “...the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...”

The Watchman must sound the warning!

Acts 20:26, “...I am pure from the blood of all men.”

Why? All the counsel of God.

- C. What are we watching for?

Romans 16:17a, “...them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned...”

- 1st - Divisions – it’s those who divide churches into factions that are loyal to themselves.

James Montgomery Boice – Often these are people who show up in a congregation suddenly, usually from another church where they have also caused trouble, though they give no indication of that when they come. They are knowledgeable. They usually have considerable abilities. They are leaders in the sense that they have enthusiasm and get people to follow them easily. Generally they are used to teaching, and they want to fill this role in their new church. Unfortunately, although the Bible warns us to make

full proof of those who want to be teachers, people like this are usually warmly welcomed and quickly put to work, because most churches need able people who actually want to serve.

But problems develop quickly. These new teachers begin to push a particular point of doctrine to the exclusion of other equally important truths. And they are critical of people who do not see things as they do or join them in pushing their personal concerns. When everyone does not go their way – and not all people do, because God always has some in any church who are not so easily taken in, who care for other believers and who are not serving themselves – these unbalanced and divisive teachers pull most of their followers away and start another fellowship. That fellowship is always presented as a more biblical, more faithful, or truer church.

The names of some churches point back to such an origin. They are “*The Christian Church*” or the only “*Full Gospel Church*” or “*The True Light Gospel Church*.” I have even seen such names as “*The Original Glorious Church*” and “*Holy Ghost Headquarters*.”

2nd – Offences – Greek = ‘*Skandalon*’, we get the word scandal.
They add things to the Bible that stumble people, or get in the way of those who are trying to obey scripture.

Illustration: The Pharisees – today, it’s legalism – they put a heavy load upon people.

But notice the last part of verse 17a, these are “...*contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned...*”

Learned where?

From Paul in Romans – for us the scriptures are the standard for all belief and behavior.

II. A Plea for Separation (vs. 17b-18)

Romans 16:17b-18, “...*and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*”

A. Avoid them – Literally, ‘keep away from them’ - don’t debate with them

Don’t watch them on T.V. ,listen to them on the radio or CD’s, or read their books. Even home Bible studies and church can be dangerous.

1 Timothy 6:3-5, *"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."*

2 Corinthians 2:17, *"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."*

'peddlers of God's word, or corrupt the word of God'

B. Why should we 'keep away from them'

Two reasons:

1. Their Motivation (vs. 18) – *"...For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly..."*

own bell - Literally "own appetites" – self interests or self-gratification

money, power, often sexual-immorality

1 Timothy 6:5, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain."*

'supposing that godliness is a way to get rich.

2. Their Methodology (vs. 18) – *"...by good words and fair speeches..."*

Literally "by smooth talk and flattery"

It happened in Rome and it's happening today.

Philippians 1:15-17, *"Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel."*

Illustration: The Word Faith Teachers

1. Special revelations. Virtually all these teachers pretend to have received special new revelations from God. Robert Tilton built a television empire that as its peak brought in over sixty-five million dollars a year, promising healing to people who would covenant with him by sending in a large financial gift. He claimed, "God showed me a vision that almost took my breath away. I was sucked into the Spirit . . . and I found myself standing in the very presence of Almighty God. . . . He said these words to me, exactly these words. At that point he introduced the plan by which he would raise money. Fortunately, Tilton's empire has fallen on financial hard times since ABC's *Prime Time Live* showed how his listeners' prayer requests were first stripped of money, then quickly disposed of in huge dumpsters.
2. Little gods. These preachers tell their followers that they are "little gods." Paul Crouch said on a Trinity Broadcasting Network program, "We are gods. I am a little god. I have his name. I am one with him." Casey Treat, the pastor of Seattle's Christian Faith Center, said, "When God looks in the mirror, he sees me! When I look in the mirror, I see God!" Kenneth Hagin, another faith healer said, "You are as much the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ was." Morris Cerullo said, "You're not looking at Morris Cerullo – you're looking at God. You're looking at Jesus."
3. A merely human Christ. Surprisingly, because it is utterly contradictory, some of these false teachers deny that Jesus Christ is fully God. Kenneth Copeland claims to have heard Jesus say, "I didn't claim I was God; I just claimed I walked with him and that he was in me. . . . That's what you're doing."
4. Demoting God. These teachers also limit God. Kenneth Copeland said, "God cannot do anything for you apart or separate from faith" because "faith is God's source of power. Frederick Price declared, "God has to be given permission to work in this earth realm on behalf of man. . . . Yes! You are in control! . . . When God gave Adam dominion, that meant God no longer had dominion. So, God cannot do anything in this earth unless we let him. And the way we let him or give him permission is through prayer."
5. Gospel of greed. This false teaching tells people how God wants them to get rich and how being poor is sinful. Frederick Price says, "If the Mafia can ride around in Lincoln Continental town cars, why can't the King's Kids?" Robert Tilton said, "Not only is worrying a sin, being poor is a sin when God promises prosperity." How different from the Son of Man, who did not even have "a place to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).

Notice verse 18b again, where it says, "...*deceive the hearts of the simple* (naïve or unsuspecting)."

III. Paul's Plea for Discernment (vs. 19-20)

Romans 16:19-20, *"For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."*

A. Thank God the Roman Christians were obedient to the true gospel (vs. 19)

Notice the words, "... wise unto that which is good..."

And, "...and simple concerning evil."

The context here is, false teaching!

The work of Satan

In verse 20 we have another benediction by Paul.

Genesis 3:15 – the first promise

Genesis 3:15, *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."*

Remember in Genesis 3:5 that Satan said, *"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."*

They were already like God, the truth is they became like Satan.

We also have three surprises in verse 20:

1. That the God of Peace should crush anyone.
2. That the crushing of Satan should be under our feet (Gen 3:15).

How?

Salvation's tenses:

- a. now
- b. future

3. That the crushing is going to happen soon.

Our victories over Satan are impossible apart from God's Grace that is through Jesus Christ.

What begins in Grace ends with Glory!

We are truly in the Grip of God's Grace

Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."